No. 60

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF
WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"Please, don't touch me," Lillian objected.

"No?" Mrs. Crawford seemed annoyed. "Still sore at me, are you? And I can't blame you, my dear child. But it is not very nice of you when I came to bring you good news."

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Cincinnati, Ohio.

LILLIAN CRAWFORD was in Miss Marie Desmond's room and they were discussing the sincerity of Mrs. Crawford's word and her manner of treatment of Lillian. Miss Desmond had expressed her opinion in no uncertain words that Lillian's stepmother, Mrs. Crawford, had not changed in heart but only in manners.

"Why should I deny it, dear? From the first I have been unable to believe in her sincerity. I know more of human nature than you, and may say that Mrs. Crawford, while she spoke, did not impress me as really meaning all she said.

"I could not help asking myself how it was possible that anybody could so suddenly change one's point of view. I cannot help but be distrustful.

"Oh, Lillian, do not look at me so full of fear. Perhaps I am too gloomy. Strange things often happen and it may be that your step-mother has changed. I do not wish to make your heart heavy, Lillian."

"But, Marie," the young girl cried, "what will happen if what you fear is true; if, after all, she does not wish me well: if she has only come here to take me from you and put me elsewhere? Oh, heaven, the thought alone makes me desperate!"

"Well," replied Marie, "if it is as you fear—what would you do, Lillian? You cannot say to your stepmother, 'I will not go with you because I mistrust you.' For the present, I cannot see that you can do anything else than submit."

Lillian grew deathly pale.

A great dread was expressed in her disturbed features and again she entwined Marie in her arms.

"Oh, you do not know how I feel, Marie," she murmured. "What if she drags me to some forsaken spot where I am lost to the world? She will take care that I

cannot reach you, or anyone else in the world! And Victor, he will look for me in vain, and in the end believe I have been untrue——"

"No, no, my dear, that can never be," came back quickly. "I will still be here, and look after you. In any event you would be able to find occasion to write to me, and I would not rest if I did not know where you were.

"Now listen to what I have to say," Marie Desmond continued. "When you arrive at Cincinnati, write me at Chicago in care of Mr. Shields, whom you know, and to whom I am going. If I do not hear from you within four days, I will know that our fears have been well-founded, and that Mrs. Crawford has taken you elsewhere.

"Then I will inform Mr. Talbot of all, and our united efforts cannot fail to find you. Do you feel better now, Lillian? You may be sure that true friends watch over you."

Sobbing, Lillian nestled on Marie's breast.

"I will be terribly unhappy, if I am kept longer from Victor, just now when he needs all my love," she wailed. "He has been acquitted, yes, but just think what he has suffered, and how he must feel after all his trials.

"My only comfort is, that if my step-mother should deceive me, you will go to him and tell him that I have thought of him in true love all the time, and that my love is his as long as I live."

"That is what I will do, Lillian. You know how much I love you," rejoined Marie, greatly moved, "and if at any time you do not know where to find refuge, then come to me; Mr. Shields always knows where I am."

"Lillian!" rang Mrs. Crawford's sharp voice through the corridor. "Where are you?"

Hastily the girl dried her eyes. Had her mother not gone to bed as she had intended? She always

dreaded to go to the woman in whom she found herself unable to repose any confidence.

If, at first, she was overcome with joy at the prospect of being with Victor again, her doubts in her stepmother's sincerity had increased momentarily, and Miss Desmond had practically confirmed them.

In the corridor, Lillian met Mrs. Crawford who looked at her with a searching, distrustful glance.

"Where were you?" she asked nervously.

"In Miss Desmond's room."

"Why have you been crying?"

For the moment, Mrs. Crawford forgot the part she was acting. She feared that Lillian had grown suspicious, or that Miss Desmond had aroused the young girl's distrust. She had caught one of Marie's glances during the afternoon which did not please her.

"I am sorry to have to leave Miss Desmond," answered Lillian softly. "She has been very kind to me and I have grown very fond of her."

Mrs. Crawford pressed her lips together, but did not answer. This, then, was how matters stood! It was high time to get rid of Miss Desmond or she would soon be making common cause with Lillian.

She was vexed with herself for having given Lillian an opportunity to speak with Marie, for she already realized that a change had taken place in Lillian's feelings towards her.

She was no longer left Lillian from her side, and under the pretense that she could not sleep alone in a strange house, she had the maid put up a cot for herself in Lillian's room, fearing that otherwise her step-daughter might go to Miss Desmond during the night.

The poor girl found no rest. When she closed her eyes, she was tortured by horrible visions.

Constantly she saw herself surrounded by dan-

gers and it always seemed as if her step-mother placed her in the midst of them.

In the morning, Mrs. Crawford hurried the departure in feverish haste. Lillian was not left alone for a moment in which she could speak with Marie, and her uneasiness was aggravated by this circumstance.

Marie felt a great pity for the poor girl, but could not show it, as it was best to appear neutral.

As she bade Lillian farewell, Mrs. Crawford stood by like a police spy and closely observed their actions. Lillian could not repress her tears, and she bit her lips to restrain an outcry.

"God be with you, Lillian!" said Marie greatly moved, and added a silent, affectionate grasp of the hand. "Do not forget, I will watch over you," she whispered to the girl.

Almost violently, Lillian at last tore herself away. She could say no more; grief and anxiety were choking her.

Marie looked after the departing taxi with tears in her eyes.

"Poor, unhappy child!" she murmured. "God alone knows what is in store for you."

Chapter 196

MABEL DALLAS

PHILIP GORDON was passing some very uncomfortable hours. He felt like a man sitting on a volcano about to erupt. Most any moment he expected to get a message from Victor Talbot, informing him of the whereabouts of Miss Marie Desmond, suspected of being his first wife. Perhaps no living man had ever been confronted with a more difficult problem.

He was married to one woman and loved another. And the other was supposedly the mother of his two children who clamored for her, with tears in their young eyes, morning, noon and night.

There had been no change in his home life. His wife was the same old Alice with the exception that she had grown more careful in her conduct toward him.

There were plenty of clashes and frequent arguments, but her general conduct was that of a woman who never took a step without reckoning with the possible consequences.

Alice knew very well that she would have to watch her step if she wanted to remain at Oak Manor as its mistress.

She could no longer play the independent one, for her father's financial collapse had robbed her of an income of her own.

If she was compelled to leave Oak Manor again, she would have to work for a living the same as any other poor woman.

This prospect was not at all to her liking ,and she

took precious good care that Phil could not get anything on her that would justify divorce proceedings.

In other words, Alice was skating on thin ice and she knew it.

She had more than a premonition that Phil would take back this Miss Marie Desmond.

Instinct warned her against the latter. She could not forget old Mrs. Jenkins' positive statement that the former governess was the first Mrs. Gordon.

Since then Alice had made strenuous efforts to get some information out of the old housekeeper, but without being successful.

The subject was never broached between Gordon and his second wife. However, many an unspoken word was uttered with eyes of fear and anticipation.

Phil seemed to be content to let matters take their course. He felt confident of being able to meet any situation.

He was well aware that Alice watched his every move with more or less suspicion. There were various hints he ignored with a tolerant smile. Only once had Alice referred to the former governess point blank.

"Whatever became of Miss Desmond after she left here?" she asked one morning at breakfast when Phil seemed in unusually good spirits.

"I haven't the least idea," he replied without looking up from the paper he was reading. "You are not worrying about her welfare are you?"

"Oh, not at all," she assured him with a malicious glance. "I just wondered."

That was the last and only time Alice mentioned the woman she hated with all the vindictiveness of which she was capable.

From that time on she carefully refrained from speaking of Miss Desmond again.

Although Alice had all the comforts and luxuries money could buy; wealth, position and a host of friends, she had never known real happiness.

And now she had become a wife in name only. She could not name the day when Phil had given her the last kiss.

An unloved wife she was—and for the most part a wretched one. But hers was the misery of her own making, and she surely was not deserving of any sympathy.

After her father died and left her without a single dollar, she made an earnest attempt to win back her husband's good will and at least a part of his affection.

But all she received for her efforts was an occasional smile of tolerance.

Alice had even discharged Nora Evans because Phil never liked her. In place of Nora she engaged a girl who called herself Mabel Dallas. While still in her twenties, Mabel's face showed plainly that she had care and sorrow.

Hers had been the frightful experience of being sold body and soul to a rich New York Chinaman.

The story of this girl's moral degradation may well be told here, for it furnished a valuable object lesson to all young girls who are tempted to harken to the call of the city.

Mabel Dallas had always wanted to go to New York. Ever since she could remember, it had been to her the one place where anything and everything that was exciting and beautiful could happen.

Her home lay three miles from a small town in New York State; a poultry raising center, and probably also the most uneventful place in the world.

When she was a little girl she thought it was fun to gather eggs for her mother, help with the chickens,

and go to school with Roy Martin and Molly McCraney, and Lottie and Jim West.

But as she grew from a freckled child into something like a beauty, she wanted something to happen in her life—but nothing ever did.

Roy Martin was always taking her to places, and, as all the other girls were crazy about him, it flattered her to have him so devoted.

He was tall, with nice reddish hair that he combed back straight. He had a nice, smiling face. She liked him very much.

However, Mabel Dallas longed for more excitement than this boy's admiration could bring, and the humdrum peace of her days and nights began to make her frantically restless.

When the family sat on the porch on summer evenings, Mabel would let her mind drift away from the conversation about Mrs. Frazer's twins and the cost of chicken feed.

It would go sailing off on trips of adventure far beyond the legions of symmetrical hen-houses and chicken-runs.

Her mind wandered to places where there was life and light and romance and music and dancing—like the places she had read about in the New York newspapers.

In the summer of her eighteenth year something did happen, at last.

One night when Roy Martin had brought her home from the movies at the nearby small town, and they stood together at the gate in the white moonlight, he turned suddenly and took her in his arms.

"I love you, Mabel—I love you!" he cried, kissing her pouting lips again and again.

She did not struggle to free herself from the young man's embrace. It gave her a thrill such as she

had never experienced before. It was nice to be kissed and loved like that.

Then, before she could gather her scattered senses, Roy Martin released her, jumped into his Ford coupe, and drove away like mad.

Mabel stood staring after him with mingled feeling and emotions.

She wondered why the moonlit yard, the henhouses, the barns, the dim road along which Roy's car was vanishing into the night — all the things she had seen a thousand times before, could look so strangely new and beautiful.

She began to love Roy Martin that night. The next evening he called again in his Ford coupe and again they drove to a movie. As they returned home the same thing happened.

This time Mabel did not remain inactive. She kissed him in return.

"Roy!" she gasped ecstatically. "I love you."

He held her off at arms' length and gazed fondly into her flushed face.

"Mabel," he said, breathing hard, "you are the most beautiful girl in the whole world. Those city girls I see in the papers are plain and almost ugly when compared with you."

"I am glad you think so," she told him as he once more took her in his strong young arms.

Two weeks later the business men of Gloversville, the county seat, announced through the press that a beauty contest was to be held in that town.

All the young girls with pretty faces and good figures were invited to participate.

Mabel Dallas was urged to compete.

"You are better looking than any other girl in this whole county," her friends told her. "Go ahead and cop

that prize."

"I am afraid my mother won't let me," she answered sadly.

It was true. Mrs. Dallas knew something about life. She knew also that a young girl is easily spoiled if she is told too often that she is pretty.

But that was not the main reason why she objected to her daughter displaying her fine figure to a gaping crowd.

She knew the danger which lurked behind such an exposition. She refused to sanction the project, and stuck to her resolution in spite of Mabel's tears and pleading.

But even a mother's fears and prejudices can be overcome.

When a number of her neighbors, headed by the school-teacher paid her a visit and prevailed upon her to allow Mabel to participate in the beauty contest at Gloversville, she weakened and gave her consent.

The beauty show was one long to be remembered by the good citizens of that town. Attired in scant bathing suits the young maidens exhibited themselves unblushingly.

Farmers with white whiskers and hair stood and adjusted their specs so they would not miss a thing.

Young huskies from every part of the county came in droves to "have a look." And they were not disappointed, for there was plenty to be seen.

The judges, three prominent business men of Gloversville, faced a difficult task in selecting the winner.

Within sight of the crowd they picked three contestants from the entire group and herded them together.

These three young beauties were scrutinized and then measured. Of the three Mabel Dallas proved to be the one most perfect.

A shout went up as she was announced the winner of the contest.

Roy Martin was at that moment the most proud young man in the whole world. Mabel Dallas was "his girl."

When he guided her to his Ford coupe after having received a silver cup as a prize, many envious eyes followed them.

"Gosh, the lucky dog!" was the expression frequently heard.

But winning a beauty contest quickly brought a change in Mabel Dallas. She was not the same afterward.

She was being admired by every man in the neighborhood and Roy Martin had scores of rivals.

The young girl suddenly found the chicken farm an unbearable place to live. She was wild to get away.

She wanted to try the power of her beauty in new and more exciting fields, away from these plain country gawks who had no standards and no appreciation.

She had read in the newspapers that girls with pretty faces and fine forms were sought after in New York.

"I want to go to New York," she told her mother blandly one morning as they were eating breakfast.

The old woman looked up, horrified.

"Why, what for, child?" she asked, her voice atremble.

"I am sick and tired of this place," Mabel complained. "And I won't stay here, that's all."

The young girl thought a moment. She was trying to find a logical reason. Yes, there was one. She needed a new dress, and there was a bargain sale at one of the big department stores.

She made her plea long and persuasive.

"Now stop fooling child," the mother laughed. "You don't mean to spend all that money for railroad fare when you can order a new dress such as you want by mail. Get that catalog and I'll help you select one."

Mabel did not get her wish, and the dress was ordered by mail.

The first sunday she wore it, she was greeted with gasps of admiration as she went to the little country church. Of course, she was delighted.

Roy Martin faced a hard task in dragging this lovely creature from the throng of admiring young men after the service.

It was then that Mabel made up her mind to run away. She felt quite sure that she could take care of herself in New York.

It seemed, however, that Roy Martin knew what her intentions were. He made her admit it, and coaxed her to stay. For a time everything seemed to be all right.

But Mabel's vanity was growing by leaps and bounds. Lottie West, her best girl chum, was also an unusually pretty girl.

These two went to Gloversville on all kinds of excuses. And the main object of these frequent trips was to be admired by the many traveling men who lounged on the front veranda of the hotel.

One day, as they passed this hotel, both girls looking bewitchingly lovely in their white frocks and extremely short skirts, they noticed a handsome man talking to the proprietor.

Mabel labeled him at once as a man from the city —New York, perhaps. And she knew by the expression of his face that he had been impressed.

She blushed in spite of her attempted sophistication. In walking on slowly, she glanced over her

shoulder occasionally.

The handsome city man was still talking to the hotel owner, and it was very evident that the subject of conversation between these two men were the two pretty girls now on the way uptown.

"I sure would like to meet him," Mabel said to her chum. "I don't believe I ever saw a man more handsome."

"Well, I wouldn't mind talking to him," the other girl admitted with a toss of her head. "But I don't think there is much chance. Come, let's go to Thompson's drugstore and get a soda."

Chapter 197

A DANGEROUS MAN

HE MAN whom the two girls saw talking to the hotel proprietor was a stranger in Gloversville. This was his first visit, and he claimed to be a traveling salesman for a New York wholesale drug house. He dressed with great care and he had a very winning smile.

Lester Calvin, as his name appeared on the hotel register, was by no means of the type known as "sidewalk sheiks." He appeared to be a gentleman born and bred.

His suave manner and the respect he showed toward the gentle sex, betrayed the Southerner.

But as a matter of fact Lester Calvin had never been further South than Covington, Kentucky. And his trips rarely took him out of New York State.

There was no necessity for it, for the business he followed could be successfully transacted close to home.

His coming to Gloversville so shortly after the beauty contest seemed significant.

He was obviously more interested in the pretty young girls who walked past the hotel than following his avowed vocation of selling drugs.

As was said before, Lester Galvin was talking to the hotel owner when Mabel Dallas and Lottie West strolled past.

Both girls attracted his attention at once, but his eyes flashed in a peculiar manner as they rested on Mabel.

"Who is that girl walking on the inside?" he in-

quired hastily.

"That's Miss Mabel Dallas," came back promptly. "She won the beauty contest in this town not so long ago. She is a might fine young lady."

The traveling man nodded reflectively.

"Where does she live?" was his next question.

"Her widowed mother runs a chicken farm about seven miles east of here," was the information cheerfully given. "I am told that the girl is growing tired of living on a farm. She wants to go to New York, I believe."

"She does, eh?" Lester Calvin's features wrinkled into a most peculiar smile. "Well, I can't blame her very much. Girls like her are always in great demand in New York."

The conversation ended here because the traveling man walked slowly across the veranda, down the steps and up the street.

Whistling softly he proceeded in th edirection of the Thompson drugstore.

His face lit up when he saw the two young girls seated at a small table sipping their ice cream sodas.

There was no one else present in the store except old Mr. Thompson, and he was busy back of the counter filling a prescription.

"I beg your pardon, ladies," he said, taking off his hat. "I hope you won't mind my speaking to you without being introduced. I would like to be granted the privilege of congratulating the one who won the beauty contest in this town."

Although he knew perfectly well which one of the two had been so honored, he waited until Lottie West pointed at her companion and said:

"That's her."

"Lester Calvin is my name," he announced with one of his most winning smiles and holding out his hand.

"You are Miss Mabel Dallas, I believe."

Mabel blushed prettily as she laid her small white hand in that of the man.

"Yes, I am Mabel Dallas," she confessed.

"Allow me to congratulate you," he said heartily.

"Oh, thank you," murmured the girl.

Mabel was too excited to introduce Lottie West. It was really not necessary, for Lester Calvin gladly waived that customary ceremony.

With great self-assurance he took a seat between the two girls and insisted upon buying a soda for them.

While they waited for the drink, he said so many nice things, so many witty things, that the ice was broken in less than ten minutes.

"It might interest you to know that I was born not far from this town," he remarked, lighting a cigaret in the most approved New York manner. Dad owned a farm down in the country. I am sure you must have heard of old Les Calvin, as they called him."

No, the girls never had heard of old Les Calvin, and it did not make the least bit of difference to them. But it pleased them to know that this modern apollo originated from a humble farm.

"I was a mere kid when dad died," the traveling man went on reminiscently. "And I could not stand life on the farm. One of my chums had been rather successful in a business venture in New York, and he asked me to join him.

"Well, I can truthfully say I never regretted it. What New York has meant to me is hard to explain in a few words. It is the city of the most wonderful opportunities."

There could be no doubt that Lester Calvin had also been a huge success in New York. His expensive clothes and the big diamond ring on his finger bespoke

affluence.

Mabel Dallas looked at the handsome New Yorker, her eyes widening with wonder. Her attention became mute adoration as he told so glibly of his rise in the world.

He became eloquent in his praise of the big city on the Hudson, and vaguely hinted that a young girl with good looks was bound to make her mark there.

"Well, I guess I am tiring you girls with bragging about New York," he ended. "Just the same I want you to think it over. It is really nothing to me whether you stay in this burg or go somewhere else."

With that he changed the subject of conversation adroitly, but noticed that Mabel Dallas had been deeply impressed.

"If you have no objection I'll drive both of you home," he suggested. "I have my own car down at the hotel garage. I'll have it here in a few minutes."

Lester Calvin did not wait to hear an objection. And neither of the girls inclined to make one.

To be driven home by this handsome New Yorker was another feather in their caps. Every female in the neighborhood would envy them.

As they drove away the traveling man shrewdly contrived to have Mabel Dallas sit with him in the front seat.

After having dropped the other girl at her home, he drove on and on without definite destination in view.

He wanted a chance to finish what he had started — the sowing of the seed of dissatisfaction in Mabel Dallas' heart.

But he did more than that. He aroused in the ignorant country girl's mind a burning curiosity to explore the mysteries of the great city of New York.

"I hope I shall have the pleasure of seeing you

often while I am in Gloversville," he said to Mabel when at last he halted in front of her modest home. "May I call and take you for a drive to-morrow evening?"

"I — I would like it," the young girl confessed frankly. "But I am afraid my mother would object."

"Why?" Calvin wanted to know.

"She says it is dangerous to go automobile riding with strange men," replied Mabel.

The man laughed.

"Well," he declared, still laughing, "you tell your dear mother that you are perfectly safe when you are with me. Why, I have a sister of my own, and she made me promise that——"

"Mabel!" came the shrill voice of Mrs. Dallas from the doorway. "I want you to come right in."

This was Lester Calvin's cue to take his departure. But before he drove away he asked the young girl to come to Gloversville the following afternoon. She consented readily and ran toward the house.

"Who was that man?" her mother demanded.

"Why, he is Mr. Calvin, a New York traveling man," Mabel answered, her soft cheeks glowing. "Lottie West and I met him at Thompson's drugstore. He was so nice that we allowed him to bring us home."

Mrs. Dallas looked her daughter over critically.

"I don't approve of it," was her judgement. "And don't let it happen again. The first thing you'll have the whole neighborhood talking about you."

Mabel felt tempted to say: "hang the neighbors," but she lowered her head and went in.

All that night she dreamed of the handsome New Yorker and the wonderful tales he had told her about the city.

The following morning she went about her duties with her mind not on the tasks at hand.

When she returned from a trip to the general merchandise store in the village, she was very much surprised to see Lester Calvin's automobile standing in front of the house.

Upon entering her surprise grew to amazement. Her mother and the man from New York were seated in the living room, talking like the best of friends.

"Good morning," said Mabel, blushingly. Then to her mother: "Here are your groceries, Ma."

Mrs. Dallas did not rise. She waited until her daughter returned from the kitchen. She had so much to tell Mabel that she did not know where to begin.

"What do you think, child," she cried, smiling amiably at the New York traveling man. "I knew Mr. Calvin's father quite well. In fact we were good friends before he married."

The young girl looked from her mother to Calvin.

"Yes, I remember hearing dad speak about a Mrs. Dallas a number of times," Calvin broke in. "And," he added with a twinkle in his eyes and addressing Mabel, "I have a vague suspicion that your mother and my dad were a little more than mere friends. They must have been——"

"No," Mrs. Dallas interrupted, obviously confused. "Your father and I were friends and nothing more. I admit, though that I regretted his moving out of the neighborhood when you were still a baby."

The discussion concerning the past, which, in Lester Calvin's case was only an imaginary one, served to change the New Yorker's standing decidedly acceptable to Mrs. Dallas.

It was an old ruse Calvin had employed upon previous occasions, and it never failed.

It seemed that the simple country folk had a weakness for falling for such fairy tales.

While it was true that a man by the name of Calvin had lived in the neighborhood many years ago, he was in no way related to this New Yorker.

Fully realizing that he must win the good will and confidence of Mrs. Dallas in order to be allowed to court Mabel, he chose the right method.

From that day on he became an almost daily visitor at the Dallas home. Upon several occasions he took mother and daughter both for long automobile rides.

Mrs. Dallas no longer objected to the New Yorker paying attention to her Mabel.

And the latter was very happy. The only thing which marred the horizon of her future, was her love affair with Roy Martin.

Roy Martin was a fine, honest young man, but he faded away to nothing when compared with the handsome man from New York.

If she married Martin she was doomed to spend the rest of her life on the farm. Her young heart turned cold at the prospect.

As Mrs. Lester Calvin, she would live in the city she longed to see. The dream of dancing to the music of a large jazz orchestra would come true.

But Mr. Calvin had not yet given her the slightest hint that he had matrimonial inclinations.

Suddenly Mabel Dallas began to realize how empty and devoid of pleasure her life had been.

With that realization came the burning desire for a glimpse of that modern paradise, which her new-found friend had described in such glowing terms.

Calvin was again the love-lorn swain, whose peculiar charm and soft persuasion no inexperienced woman could withstand.

He looked like a young man of twenty-five as he strolled along the lonely country road at the side of the

lovely Mabel Dallas.

His face wore the expression of rapt anticipation, while the fire of love and well-controlled passion burned in his eyes. The steady gaze of those dark orbs acted like a magnet to the young girl.

The blushes, shy and forbidden, chasing one another across her sweet face, spoke volumes.

Innocent Mabel Dallas had listened to Calvin's tale of love before many days passed. Her young heart responded quickly enough.

She buried her crimson face in his bosom, and when a moment later he lifted it and pressed the first kiss upon her chaste lips, a tremor ran through her slender figure.

She trembled from head to foot when he kissed her again that night.

There was something in those passionate kisses that frightened her, and she struggled to free herself. They were kisses that could leave no woman as they found her.

"You — you must not kiss me like that!" she panted. "I—I don't like it. I should not have permitted you to kiss me at all, because we are not even engaged."

Calvin's laugh was low and musical.

"Why, you dear, silly little darling!" he cried. "Do you suppose for one moment I would presume to take that liberty with you if I did not mean to make you my wife?"

"Then—you really are going to marry me?" the young girl breathed rapturously.

"Indeed I am," was the villain's instant rejoinder. "But we must keep it a secret for a while. I have a reason for that. You won't mind it, will you?"

She shook her head with a sweet smile, and thus their love pact was sealed.

Calvin had indeed a good reason for persuading Mabel to keep their love secret from her mother..

She obeyed him meekly and Mrs. Dallas remained in blissful ignorance of what was transpiring under her very nose. Little did she know what the outcome of this affair would be.

— 1913 —

Chapter 198

TRUE LOVE

MRS. DALLAS never dreamed that her young daughter stood on the edge of a mighty precipice. A few words of advice would have saved the unsuspecting girl. One word in time might have averted the calamity which was destined to befall an old New England family which had dwelled in peace and harmony since it was founded.

But the word of warning was never spoken. She had all the confidence in the world in Calvin. She had not the slightest inkling of the man's unsavory record where women were concerned.

Little did she dream that the man who had introduced himself in her home was in reality a wolf in sheep's clothing. Not even the least shadow of such a thought had ever entered her mind.

And opportunity favored Calvin.

With his coming the hand of an evil fate held open the door. With the entrance of this arch villain came grief, sorrow and heartaches.

What he desired most, had come quite sudden and unexpectedly. An innocent young girl had been virtually thrown at his head, and he was depraved enough to make the best of the opportunity.

He amused himself with the young girl without offering her an insult.

His hour had not yet come. The beast was not yet ready to show its claws. First of all he must succeed in trapping the intended victim securely.

They played tennis and took long drives together

every day. Roy Martin had called a number of times, but he invariably was informed that Mabel was out with Mr. Calvin.

His instinctive distrust of the man from New York had grown constantly from day to day.

Somehow he felt positive that Mabel Dallas' stainless name was in danger. They had been regarded as sweethearts for a long time. As children they were playmates.

He loved her, yes, he adored her like a beautiful star to be worshipped from afar.

When manhood began to dawn Roy Martin's shyness in the young girl's presence had done little to help his cause. In Mabel's eyes he was still a boy in spite of the fact that he had passed his twentieth year.

She had always been kind to him, and now since the stranger from New York had come between them, his presence was no longer desired.

Roy Martin realized this with a strange sinking of his heart and he was unwilling to relinquish her without a murmur of protest.

Mabel had evaded him upon several occasions when he had tried to take her to task.

His love for her was pure and unselfish. Above all things he wanted her to be happy. If she loved Calvin, he wanted to hear it from her own lips.

It was of this he wanted to assure himself when he wrote the letter asking her to meet him.

He told her that he intended to leave this part of the country and that he was very anxious to say goodby to her alone. His heart grew bitter as he thought of the encouragement she had always given him.

He could not forget that many sweet smiles she had bestowed upon him, and how once she hid her blushing face upon his bosom, when she lay in his arms.

The kiss he had stolen from her that night still lingered on his lips.

Its sweetness and fragrance time could never erase.

And now that man from New York had come between them. He had taken her young heart by storm.

The hour for their meeting was set for eight o'clock that evening. Roy Martin was first to arrive at their old trysting place, a clump of trees near the road.

It was here they spent many blissful moments, gazing across the moon-kissed meadows and fields.

He had taken his old seat, but rose abruptly when he saw her shimmering white dress in the dim distance. He watched her every move as she approached him timidly.

As she came within a few yards of him, Roy's hungry eyes rested upon her shapely white-robed figure.

The expression in his eyes was one of mingled rapture and pain.

They absorbed every detail — her elegance, her peculiar, indescribable, tantalizing charm.

It was a charm that lay not in the mere fulness of her yet slender form, nor in the sweetness of her pink and white face.

It was a secret fire whose flame burned steadily and purely in her matchless eyes.

Roy Martin fought with all his might to restrain himself from crushing her to his bosom. The impulse was strong, yes, almost unresisting. But he succeeded in holding himself in check.

Mabel Dallas had come close, slowly, until she stood directly in front of him.

Her steady gaze confused him for a moment and he turned away.

"I may as well tell you at once why I wrote you

that letter and asked you to meet me here," he began with unusual brusqueness. "As I told you I am leaving this part of the country, and in all probability will be gone for good."

He paused confusedly for a moment, then continued haltingly:

"Of course, you — you know I could not say good-by to you like I shall do to all the others—I mean the rest of my friends. I wanted to see you alone if only for a minute."

Mabel Dallas did not evade the pathetic stare of his eyes.

She met it bravely for a few seconds only, however.

"Yes," she replied in a hardly audible voice. "I —I know. I understood your letter."

"Perhaps I have not the right to assume this aggrieved air," Roy Martin went on. "And perhaps I had not the right to expect what I did——"

"What did you expect?" the girl asked gently.

"To hear you say that you loved me, Mabel. I had always dreamed that some day those words would come from your lips, but I suppose I am to be disappointed."

She regarded him for a short space of time without speaking.

"Did you want to meet me here alone just to repeat that same old story?" she inquired with a note of impatience in her voice."

"Yes, I did."

"Can't you forget that we were only good friends, Roy? You know what I mean — just boys and girls together?"

She raised her eyes to him. They were unwavering.

Her glance went to his head like intoxicating wine

and his expression took on that old recklessness which seemed to change him to a boy again.

"I know I made a fool of myself," he declared under his breath, as his gaze dived into hers, and his face grew white and set. "But I am not ashamed to say it again."

"To say what, Roy."

"That I love you, Mabel. And I guess I must go on loving you to the end of my days. I could never love another woman after having known you. There is no remedy for a hopeless case like mine. But I could not stay here and watch you slowly moving farther and farther out of my reach."

The young girl drew a little away from him. He saw the move.

"Tell me," he pleaded. "Is it really true? Is there not one spark of hope for me?"

A tender smile chased the shadow that had fallen across her lovely features as the words he had uttered so often in his boyish ecstacy, again fell upon her ears.

She did not answer but took a seat on the trunk of a fallen tree nearby.

He took a seat beside her, and as she stroked his arm, which was bare below the elbow, her face grew sweet and gentle.

It was a caress such as he had not expected in the face o fexisting circumstances. Hope blazed up anew.

Suddenly she leaned toward him.

"Roy," she whispered, "I am very sorry. I know I have been at fault. Will you forgive me?"

"Forgive?" he replied angrily.

"Yes, forgive," she went on in the same gentle whisper. "I am more sorry than you will ever know. I—I wish from the bottom of my heart it might have been otherwise, but there isn't any use in even talking

about that. It is too late—too late."

There was a wild pain in her voice, and the expression of her face was almost one of fright.

The shock of her words seemed to paralyze him for he sat as one stunned and dazed but what she had just told him.

Chapter 199

GOODBY.

THE SUDDEN realization of it all shocked Mabel Dallas as nothing had ever shocked her before. The full truth came upon her like a flash. She had wronged Roy, yes, she had wounded him mortally. With an impulsive gesture she stretched out both of her hands, trembling visibly.

He did not take her hands. He only stared at her mutely.

Roy Martin was plunged in a helpless agony and confusion that made any sort of speech an utter impossibility for the instant.

"Would you mind telling me just what you mean by that?" he asked presently.

He had formed the words slowly, as if every one cost him a distinct effort of will which taxed his power of mental endurance to the utmost.

Moisture had gathered on his brow, and his hands opened and closed convulsively for a few moments.

Mabel again leaned forward and laid one hand on his knee.

"Roy," she said. "Roy, I am not ashamed to say so, but as I told you before it is too late. I—I did love you once. Yes, I did, and it is true."

An awed light leaped into his eyes. They faced her boldly now.

There was a peculiar expression in them. It was a challenge which came directly from his tortured soul. It demanded that she must lift the veil.

It demanded to know by what power this hand-

some stranger from New York had won her away from him.

Was it by fair means or foul?

Her own soul rose with dignity and compassion to meet that challenge.

There was a long silence, and then, with a sudden jerk, he drew back from her searching gaze with a look in his eyes as if she had stabbed and wounded him unto death.

He knew that she had broken down the barrier of conventionality between them out of pity for him. And he would never accept her pity.

Why had she always kept him at a distance? Why had she not bared her heart to him before it was too late?

Everything seemed to grow dark about him, and then once more out of the deep shadows of the increasing darkness the lovely face began to take on a vague reality and become strangely luminous like the features of one long dead seen in a dream.

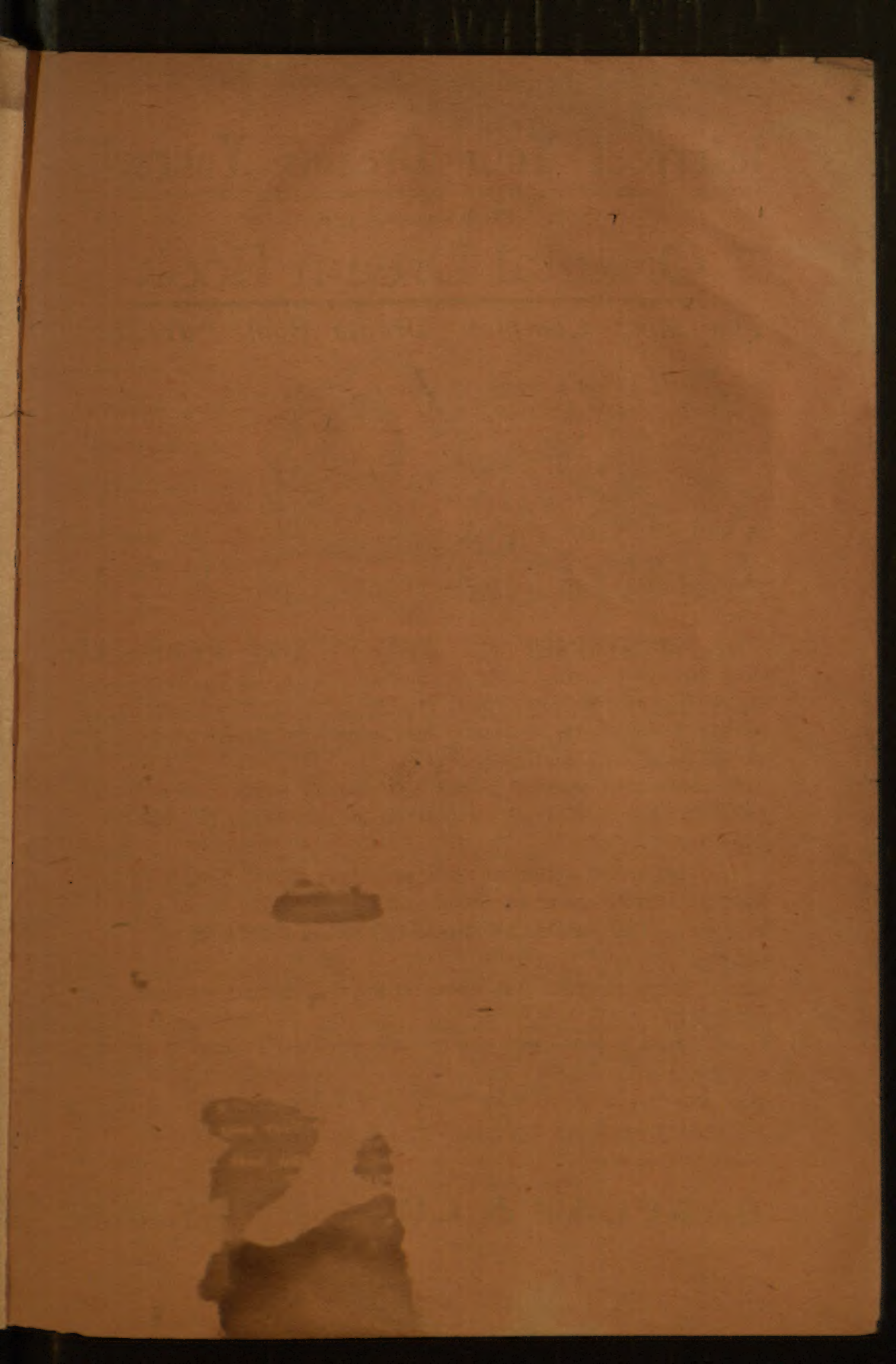
She was speaking, but her words came to him from far away, and his eyes wore a look which frightened her.

Her hand again touched his knee with tremulous haste. How splendid and handsome he looked in spite of his youth. He had never appeared so handsome to her before.

Why could he not have been like this before the other came?

"Roy," she said again, and her voice was low and pleading "I told you before that I loved you once—that is I almost loved you. I think I would have done it completely, with all my heart and soul if it was not for —for the other."

Continued in next number



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